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ABSTRACT

In order to assess attitude stability or change and the conceptual framework of Kerckhoff's thesis (1976) that occupational aspirations are specifically affected by "observed structural constraints", data derived from the Southern Youth Study (a male subset from the Alabama, Texas, and Georgia panel comprised of 221 whites and 146 nonwhites, 94% of which were black, and gathered in 1966 and 1968 when the respondents were sophomores and seniors, respectively) were applied to a causal model. Variables employed were race; socioeconomic status of family of origin; residence (rural farm, rural nonfarm; small town, and small city); occupational aspiration in the sophomore year; level of perceived goal-blockage in the sophomore year; and level of occupational aspiration in the senior year. Results indicated: the hypothesized model was supported by zero-order relationships; there was little empirical validity in the path analytic results; the effects of perceived constraints were not significant for either sub-sample in a comparison of the basic model for whites and nonwhites, though the coefficients were much larger for nonwhites than for whites. (JC)

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SOCIAL ORIGIN AND ATTITUDINAL PERCEPTION IN THE DYNAMICS OF OCCUPATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT ORIENTATION*

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ABSTRACT

Earlier occupational aspiration theory (e.g., Ginzberg's Developmental theory) suggests an "increasingly rationalistic" process of aspiration formation. More recently, Kerckhoff (1976) argues that such achievement attitudes are specifically affected by "observed structural constraints" and that these perceived impedances are taken into account processually during adolescenthood. Applying data from a subset of males from the Southern Youth Study to a causal model of this conceptual framework reveals that while zero-order relationships consistently support the hypothesized model, path analytic results demonstrate little empirical validity. Comparing the basic model for white and non-whites, the effects of perceived constraints are not significant for either sub-sample; however the coefficients are much larger for non-whites than for whites. Limitations of the findings are emphasized.

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INTRODUCTION

Aspects of socialization have been depicted as important factors in sub-processes of status attainment (Cf. Sewell and Hauser, 1975; Porter, 1974). Occupational aspirations, as socialized consequences of adolescent development through the life-cycle, are considered to be significant intervening factors which facilitate the transmission of social origin intergenerationally (see esp. Picou and Carter, 1976).

An underlying assumption to this conceptual framework is that attitudinal dispositions, e.g., occupational "aspirations" and "expectations" (Cf. Kuvlesky and Bealer, 1966), are somewhat rationally based. Earlier developmental theory (Ginzberg, et. al., 1951; see esp. Osipow, 1968) suggests an "increasingly rationalistic" process in occupational aspiration-formation; this perspective embraces a bi-directional conceptualization of such aspiration-formation (Cf. Cosby, Ohlendorf, and Falk, 1974). Research into this process has turned up little empirical support for the tenet that as adolescents mature they move from being "goal-centered" to "means-centered" (Cosby and Picou, 1971).

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*Data analyzed in this paper were provided by the USDA (CSRS) Southern Regional Project, S-81 in cooperation with the Agricultural Experiment Stations of Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina and Texas.

Central to this "means-centering" process, sometimes called the process of "increasing realism of choice" (Cosby, 1974), is the thesis that adolescents consider factors which they perceive to be impedances to the subsequent attainment of their aspirations. Kerckhoff (1976: 371) argues that such achievement attitudes are affected by "observed structural constraints" and that the individual's knowledge of the significance of such limitations increases with age. He suggests that these achievement attitudes "get adjusted to the 'real world'" during adolescenthood. It is posited that these impedances are taken into account processually as these occupational attitudes become more "realistic"; that is, realistic in the sense that levels of aspiration tend to reflect social origin or "probable" attainment. This paper is an attempt at modeling this social psychological process. Our objectives include the presentation of a causal model of this process of "increasing realism" in occupational aspiration levels, and an empirical assessment of the model using data from a two-wave panel of rural youth.

MODEL DEVELOPMENT

The basic research problem under consideration is one of attitude stability or change. Particularly significant conditions for attitudinal change are thought to include: a) that the new attitude appears rewarding; and b) that the individual feels that the change is self-originated and not externally imposed (Johnson, 1973: 376). In modeling such social psychological processes it would be pretentious to claim that in using panel survey data the above two conditions have been assessed in their entirety. Instead, we assume the model shown in Figure 1 possesses some validity in assessing some dimensions of the conditions for such attitude change.

This assumption is based on the following rationale.

The model posits that indicators of social origin such as residence, race, and socioeconomic status of parental family are exogenous and antecedent to what is known about the occupational world, i.e., level of occupational knowledge (Cf. Parnes and Kohen, 1975). This knowledge about occupational roles and the means to attain them (Cf. Porter, 1974: 304) affects, along with social origin, the level of occupational aspiration (Howell; 1976). Level of perceived blockage is endogenous to these antecedent factors and is an indicator of the individual's awareness of the "realism" of his particular level of aspiration. That is, it is an indicator of the individual's perception of the social contingencies involved in his present level of occupational aspiration. It is hypothesized here that differences in what is known about the occupational world is a significant antecendent to what one perceives about a personal attitude (or level of aspiration), independent of social origin. This sub-process depicts a basis for a rationally-based change in attitudes.

Returning to Figure 1, the level of perceived blockage acts as an intervening factor between social origin, level of occupational knowledge, level of occupational aspiration and subsequent level of aspiration. This process reflects a cognitive basis for the solution to the two conditions for attitude change cited above. One, changing the level of aspiration lends itself to being a reward state by accomodating the level of perceived blockage. Two, knowledge of the means to attain levels of aspiration facilitates an internally--rather than externally--imposed change in attitudes.

METHODOLOGY

The data for this research are from the Southern Youth Study,[1] a longitudinal multi-wave panel study of non-metropolitan youth from six southern states. The sample design was purposive in nature emphasizing variation in the socioeconomic characteristics of the selected counties in the participating states (See Ohlendorf, 1975, for details of the study design). While the panel members are not, strictly speaking, representative of any larger population, they are stratified by race and sex and do afford us an appropriate research design for analyzing processual changes in occupational attitudes. Data analyzed here are a male subset (N = 367) of the panel from the three states (Alabama, Georgia, and Texas) where the appropriate data were collected in both 1966 and 1968. The sample consists of 221 white and 146 non-white males (of which over 94% are black).

The first (1966) and second (1968) waves of data were gathered via group-administered standardized questionnaires, in the tenth and twelth grades, respectively. During the second wave some respondents who had dropped out of school or who had moved were recontacted via personal interview and/or a mailed questionnaire.

The operational scheme for each variable used in the analysis is outline below:

1. Socioeconomic Status of Family-of-Origin (SES)-is a summated index of standardized scores using three status indicators: father's and mother's education, and major income earner's occupation. Educational levels were structured into eight levels, from "no school" to "college graduate". Occupations were coded into the Duncan SEI.

2. Race (RACE)-is dichotomized into white (1) and non-white (0).

3. Residence (RES)-is categorized into four levels of increasing population density: 1 = rural farm area, 2 = rural non-farm area, 3 = small town (< 2500), 4 = small city (> 2500).[2]

4. Occupational Knowledge (OCCKNO)-is measured by a composite index consisting of the summated first-factor scores of five items dealing with occupations and the labor force. The factor scores were derived from a principal component factor analysis using no rotation.[3] Two of the questions pertained to occupational rewards (income) and requirements (educational prerequisites), while the remaining three measured the respondent's knowledge of changes in the then-current labor force (unemployment, growing jobs, growing industries). Response accuracy scores were derived from relevant information gathered from bulletins of the Bureau of Labor Statistics and Census reports. Each item had an accuracy range from one-to-five.

5 Level of Occupational Aspiration in the Sophomore Year (LOA66)- is the unweighted average of SEI scores assigned to occupational aspirations and expectations; this measure approximates the idealistic and realistic limits of aspiration level (Cf. Ohlendorf, 1975).

6. Level of Perceived Goal-Blockage in the Sophomore Year (PGB66)- is measured by a ten item factor scale utilizing first-factor score weightings; these were determined by a principle-component analysis with no rotation. The resulting scale internal-consistency reliability coefficients alpha and theta are .76 and .77, respectively.[4] The elicitor for this measure was as follows: "How much effect do you think each of the following things will have in keeping you from getting the job you desire?" The response items were: Lack of money to attend school, schools attended, lack of parental interest, race, no incentive for residential mobility, national job scarcity, community job scarcity, local educational facilities, lack of knowledge about opportunities, and intellectual ability. Respondents rated the perceived blockage of each item on a four point continuum from "not at all" to "very much".

7. Level of Occupational Aspiration in the Senior Year (LOA68)- is measured identically to LOA66; see above.

Treatment of Item Non-Response

To avoid case losses due to the large number of items used to measure some of our concepts (Cf. Hertel, 1976), randomly-generated values were substituted for item non-responses. A computer program was developed to generate random values falling within a normal distribution approximating the observed distribution of each

variable. The distribution of each variable was approximated by using the mean and standard deviation derived from the observed values from respondents who gave codeable responses to the particular item. Such estimated values result in slightly conservative product-moment correlation estimates (Hertel, 1976). Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, and number of item non-responses for each variable and index component.

RESULTS

The focus of this discussion will be on the interrelationship of occupational knowledge (OCCKNO) and perceived goal blocks (PGB66), and their impact on 1966 and 1968 occupational aspirations (LOA66, LOA68) controlling for social origin. It is these specified relationships in the model that we feel constitute a processual assessment of the hypothesis of realism suggested above.

Inspecting Table 2 gives the correlations and summary statistics for the conceptual model presented in Figure 1. The zero-order correlation between LOA66 and LOA68 (r= .576) indicates that there was relative instability in aspiration levels during high school; however, there are some unanalyzed dimensions of this "instability" (Cf. Heise, 1977). It should be noted that <u>on the average</u> aspiration levels increased slightly during high school. Noting the slight mean inflation over a two-year period, and at the same time only a moderate positive correlation between LOA66 and LOA68, indicates that although there were some aspirational changes between the two time periods, overall levels were relatively stable. This seems to demonstrate that although there is considerable flux in occupational aspirations, there is no generally observable downward modification of aspiration levels of Southern rural males.

Turning to the regression coefficients (see Table 3) for the just-identified model presented in Figure 1, it is evident that SES has a significant impact on most of the endogenous variables in the model. On the other hand, the main effects of place of residence (RES) on endogenous variables are both substantively and statistically insignificant. This is contrary to what might be expected (Cf. Picou and Carter, 1976; Sewell and Orenstein, 1965) but reflects, in our data, the correlation of residence (RES) with other origin variables (see Table 2).

Examining the results in light of the conceptual issues raised at the outset reveals very little empirical support. The hypothesized impact of occupational knowledge (OCCKNO) on perceived blockage (PGB66), and the related issue of the influence of LOA66 on PGB66 do not reach statistical significance. Although these paths ($P_{occkno-pgb66}$, $P_{loa66-pgb66}$), are negative as expected, their effects are inconsequential. More importantly, the effect that perceived goal blockage during the sophomore year has on senior aspirations is also statistically insignificant and substantively low ($P_{pgb66-loa68} = -.072$). While the zero-order correlation of -.184 between PBG66 and LOA66 appears supportive of the hypothesis of "realism" operating via earlier perceived blockage suppressing later levels of aspiration, decomposing this simple relationship shows that it is primarily (61% of the zero-order correlation) due to the joint dependence of senior level of aspiration and sophomore perceived blockage on specified antecedant factors.

Because the conceptual model received little empirical support and because several studies dealing with status attainment (See for example Porter, 1974; Kerckhoff, 1972 and 1976; and Portes and Wilson, 1976) have argued for the

analysis of racial differences in status attainment, it is important to note the influences of race (RACE) in our model. Tables 2 and 3 show that there are predominant RACE correlations and path effects for all endogenous variables except levels of aspiration. The moderate simple correlations between race (RACE) and aspirations (LOA66, LOA68) result in mediated path effects through OCCKNO and PGB66.

In order to gain additional insight into the dynamics of our model we constructed models for both whites and non-whites. Separate coefficients for the two samples enable us to analyze the full effects that race has with the other model variables (Portes and Wilson, 1976: 423). Since there are differences in variances between the models, this alternative approach to partitioning total variance requires that comparisons be based on unstandardized regression coefficients rather than standardized path coefficients. The correlations and summary statistics for the separate models are presented in Table 4 while the regression coefficients for both models are given in Table 5.

Table 4 shows some interesting race differentials in mean occupational knowledge ($t = 5.82$, $P < .001$) and mean perceived goal blockage ($t = -4.36$, $P < .001$). That is, whites have significantly more knowledge about occupations and less perceived blockage. Additionally, as was found for the panel as a whole, the zero-order correlation between earlier perceived blockage and later level of occupational aspiration are negative and therefore supportive of the hypothesized effects of "realism" for both whites and non-whites. A caveat here is the divergence in the correlations of occupational knowledge (OCCKNO) and perceived blockage (PGB66): the correlation for whites ($r = -.141$) is substantively larger than that for non-whites ($r = -.030$).

The levels of occupational aspirations are much more dependent on social origin for whites than for non-whites (See Table 5); this finding is in agreement with other models of aspiration-formation (Cf. Portes and Wilson, 1976; Porter, 1974). For whites, social origin has a significant impact on occupational knowledge (OCCKNO) which in turn has a subsequent negative influence on perceived goal blocks. However, perceived blockage does not depress senior levels of aspiration. Social origin (SES) transmits its positive influence directly. For non-whites the pattern of effects differ substantially. Social origin (SES) does not affect occupational knowledge (OCCKNO); however, occupational knowledge transmits a significant effect on level of aspiration at both time periods (as it does for whites). SES impacts negatively upon perceived blockage (PGB66), which in turn only meagerly depresses LOA68. The important relationship to note here is the much closer linkage of occupational knowledge to perceived blockage for whites than for non-whites.

DISCUSSION

The conceptual model developed from the literature was not generally supported by our analysis, when the zero-order relationships were made more explicit by applying them to a path analysis. The model applied to the total panel did not support the theoretically expected impact of perceived goal blockage on level of occupational aspiration. In addition, the role of occupational knowledge being an important antecedent to perceived blockage was not strongly supported for the total group. Place of residence did not have a noteable impact on the model of perception dynamics in aspiration-formation.

The main effects of race (RACE) as a social origin variable led us to compare the model for race sub-groups. This comparison led to the conclusion that the overall model was not supported empirically in the path analysis for either whites or non-whites. However, several relationships in this comparison are noteworthy. As expected, social origin had a much greater impact on level of aspirations for whites than non-whites. A caveat here is the finding that, while there are significant differentials in level of occupational knowledge and perceived blockage for whites and non-whites, occupational knowledge has a continuing effect on occupational aspirations throughout high school for both groups. We interpret the main effects of race in the model as meaning that, for whites, occupational knowledge is more dependent on social origin and these effects are the primary antecedents (in this model) for perceived blockage. On the other hand, for non-whites occupational knowledge does not substantively affect perceived blockage as the latter is more directly dependent on social origin.

This set of findings tentatively supports what Kerckhoff (1972: 145) says about the "realism" of aspirations for blacks: "Undoubtably, some of. . . (them). . . simply reflect wishful thinking, but it is also likely that black children on the average are less aware of what steps are necessary to accomplish their goals." What we find in our analysis is that non-whites on the average are not only less aware of the means to attain occupational goals but they also, on the average, perceive more "structural constraints" than do their white counterparts. In terms of the "realism" of white-non-white aspirations, the greater association (both via correlation and regression) of occupational knowledge with perceived blockage for whites in part supports Kerckhoff's argument. The divergence here empirically is that for both race groups

their ability to ". . . estimate the probabilities of various outcomes" (Kerckhoff, 1976: 371) and how these estimates impact on future attitudinal achievement orientations is not supported.

The limitations of our findings should be taken quite seriously, primarily that the purposive nature of panel sample design limits the generalizability of our findings. Furthermore, measures of the attitudinal variables, especially occupational knowledge, need additional development. Future research dealing with the aspect of realism and occupational aspiration-formation should specify perceived constraints in a more elaborate manner.

NOTES

1. The data used in this paper are from the S-81 Regional Project, Development of Human Resource Potentials of Rural Youth in the South and Their Patterns of Mobility, sponsered by the USDA (CSRS) and carried by the Agricultural Experiment Stations of Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Texas.

2. A linearity test for RES and the other variables in the model revealed no statistically significant deviations from linearity.

3. Because of the small number of items used to measure occupational knowledge we did not subject these items to rigorous factor scaling, instead we constructed a summated index using all five items. Each Item was weighted on the basis of its principle-component factor scores (unrotated first-factor scores).

4. The perceived goal blockage factor scale was constructed using scaling procedures similar to those recommended by Armor (1974).

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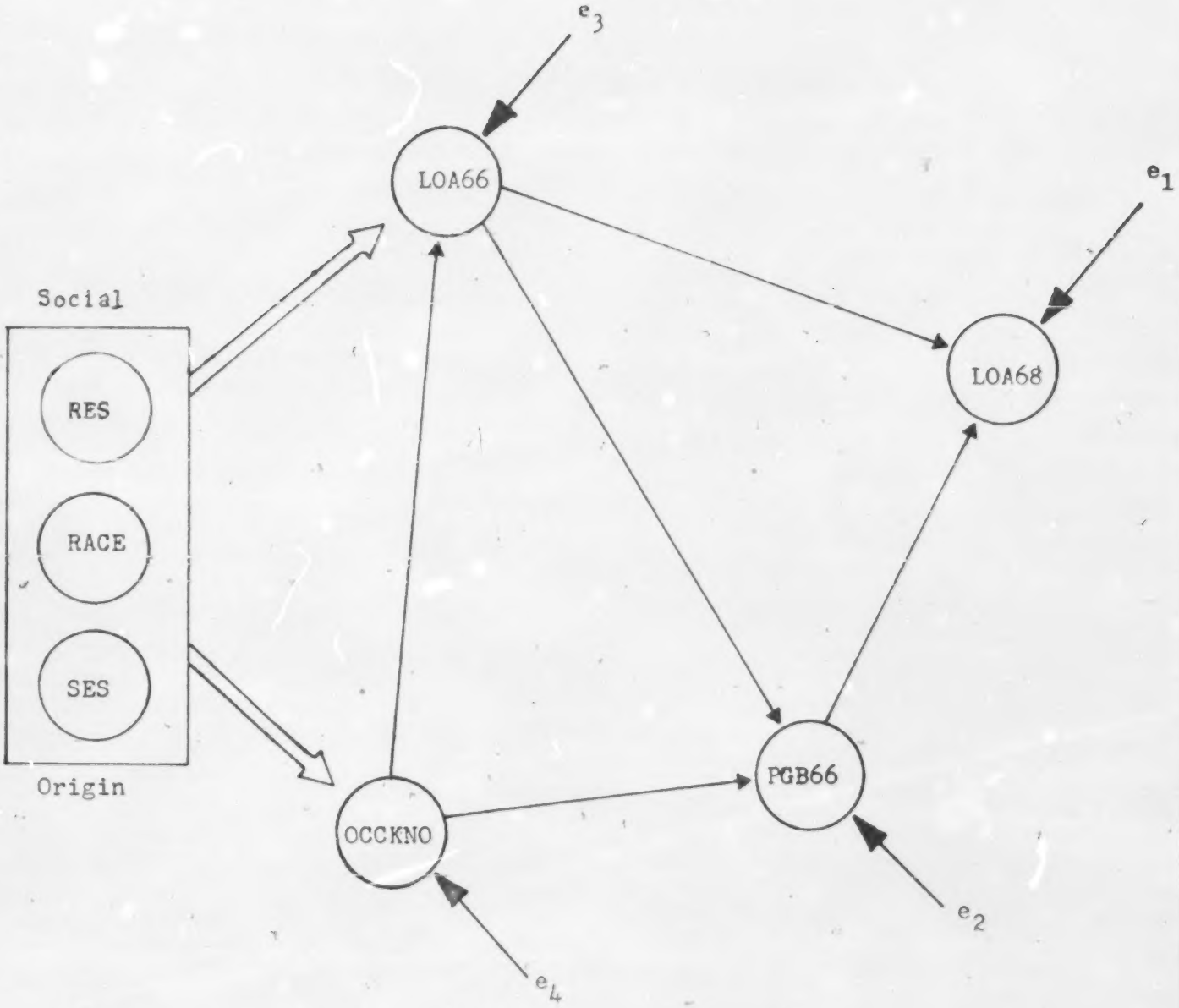

Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Occupational Aspiration Dynamics

Table 1. Disaggregated Model Variables, Means, Standard Deviations, and Percentages of the Known Distribution of Responses.

Variable	$\overline{X}$	S.D.	N Missing	% Total
SES				
Father's Education	4.003	1.754	42	11.4
Mother's Education	4.504	1.526	30	8.2
Major Income Earner's Occupation	27.458	21.661	35	9.5
LOA66				
Aspiration	49.919	27.738	7	1.9
Expectation	46.483	27.628	19	5.2
OCCKNO				
Earnings	4.336	.878	4	1.1
Education	4.585	.786	3	.8
Industries	3.868	.834	4	1.1
Jobs	3.641	1.537	5	1.3
Unemployment	3.386	1.337	7	1.9
PGB66				
Financial	1.954	1.018	19	5.2
Schools Attended	1.654	.941	17	4.6
Parent's Interest	1.564	1.000	21	5.7
Race	1.431	.863	21	5.7
Residential Non-Mobility	1.480	.836	23	6.3
Nat. Job Scarcity	1.746	.946	20	5.4
Local Job Scarcity	1.988	1.038	21	5.7
Local Ed. Facilities	1.566	.902	17	4.6
Know. of Opportunities	1.872	.925	22	6.0
Intellectual Ability	1.744	.989	20	5.4
LOA68				
Aspiration	54.046	25.298	17	4.6
Expectation	48.306	27.575	43	11.7

Table 2. Correlations, Means and Standard Deviations for Model

	2	3	4	5	6	7	$\bar{X}$	S.D.
1. RES	-.053	-.276	-.075	-.135	.057	-.177	2.74	2.12
2. RACE	---	.230	.308	.163	-.228	.206	0.00	0.49
3. SES		---	.184	.303	-.169	.307	-0.08	0.75
4. OCCKNO			---	.278	-.149	.318	0.00	1.00
5. LOA66				---	-.128	.576	48.33	25.18
6. PGB66					---	-.184	0.00	1.00
7. LOA68						---	51.40	23.25

Table 3. Regression Coefficients for Just-Identified Model[a]

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	R^2
1. RES	---	**	**	-.030	-.050	.009*	-.069	
2. RACE	**	---	**	.281	.038	-.178	.043	
3. SES	**	**	---	.111	.241	-.010	.094	
4. OCCKNO	-.027*	.574	.148	---	.218	-.061	.137	.109
5. LOA66	-1.131*	1.953*	8.046	5.494	---	-.050	.484	.147
6. PGB66	.008*	-.362	-.132*	-.061*	-.002*	---	-.072	.073
7. LOA68	-1.430*	2.060*	2.916	3.190	.447	-1.665*	---	.385

* N.S. at twice the standard error.

[a] Unstandardized regression coefficients below diagonal, standardized path coefficients above.

Table 4. Correlations, Means and Standard Deviations
For the White and Non-white Subsamples*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	$\bar{X}_w$	S.D.$_w$
1. RES	---	-.337	-.026	-.251	.120	-.266	2.688	1.159
2. SES	-.146	---	.198	.385	-.127	.410	.065	.771
3. OCCKNO	-.109	.032	---	.239	-.141	.272	.250	.822
4. LOA66	.094	.071	.257	---	-.095	.612	51.665	25.674
5. PGB66	-.060	-.120	-.030	-.094	---	-.150	-.185	.922
6. LOA68	-.016	.045	.280	.484	-.135	---	55.294	22.452
$\bar{X}_b$	2.808	-.289	-.379	43.270	.280	45.500		
S.D.$_b$	1.052	-.672	1.122	23.624	1.050	23.273		

*White sample above the diagonal; non-white below.

Table 5. Regression Coefficients for White and Non-white Models*

A. Whites

Independent Variables	Dependent Variables: OCCKNO	LOA66	PGB66	LOA68
SES	.228	10.058	-.078	4.763
	(.075)	(2.199)	(.091)	(1.704)
RES	.033	-3.194	.071	-1.472
	(.050)	(1.435)	(.057)	(1.076)
OCCKNO	---	5.473	-.137	3.030
		(1.944)	(.078)	(1.472)
LOA66		---	-.001	.436
			(.003)	(.050)
PGB66			---	-1.383
				(1.277)
Constant	0.147	58.227	-0.303	35.421
R^2	.041	.195	.038	.431

B. Non-whites

Independent Variables	Dependent Variables: OCCKNO	LOA66	PGB66	LOA68
SES	.027	2.894	-.196	-.341
	(.140)	(2.848)	(.132)	(2.556)
RES	-.114	3.032	-.073	-1.044
	(.090)	(1.829)	(.085)	(1.643)
OCCKNO	---	5.669	-.014	3.307
		(1.698)	(.081)	(1.565)
LOA66		---	-.003	.433
			(.004)	(.075)
PGB66			---	-2.069
				(1.622)
Constant	-0.051	37.740	0.565	31.444
R^2	.012	.088	.027	.270

*The standard errors are in parentheses.